



June 12, 2012

## **Leaking Intelligence: Bad National Security, Questionable Politics**

Former Director of Central Intelligence Stansfield Turner observed, “[T]he White House staff tends to leak when doing so may help the President politically.” President Obama’s Administration is choosing to brag about its national security successes by leaking highly sensitive intelligence information. These leaks have consequences that diminish the country’s intelligence capabilities, and make us all less secure.

### **Secret Even In Success**

Nine days after the September 11 terrorist attacks, President Bush [said](#) the nation’s response to those attacks would involve a spectrum of activity, including clandestine intelligence matters that would have to remain “secret even in success.”

- Secretary of Defense Gates [said](#) after the operation to bring Osama bin Laden to justice: “we want to retain the capability to carry out these kinds of operations in the future. And when so much detail is available, it makes that both more difficult and riskier.” To this end, Gates [said](#), on the day of the bin Laden operation, the participants “all agreed that we would not release any operational details from the effort to take out bin Laden.”
- That agreement “fell apart ... the next day,” Gates said. It stands as perhaps the most prominent, but certainly not the most recent, example of the Obama Administration’s selective leaking of intelligence information for political purposes that compromises our national security.

### **The bin Laden Operation**

It started with the Obama Administration giving Hollywood filmmakers direct access to officials involved in the operation. They may have revealed the name of a member of SEAL Team Six. All for the purpose of making a movie originally scheduled to be released three weeks before the November election.

- Not long after the operation, a Marine at Camp Lejeune presciently [asked](#) Gates during a town hall meeting, “What measures are being taken to protect the identities and the lives of the SEAL team members, as well as the lives of military forces deployed that might have to face extreme retaliation from terrorist organizations that want to have those identities known?”
- Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mullen [said](#): “We are close to jeopardizing this precious capability that we have, and we can’t afford to do that. This fight isn’t over, first of all. Secondly, when you now extend that to concern with individuals in the military and their families, from my perspective it is time to stop talking. And we have talked far too much about this ... [I]t needs to [end].”
- It is notable that neither Gates nor Panetta participated in the NBC News interview from the Situation Room marking the first anniversary of the operation.

## **Jailing of the bin Laden Informant**

One consequence of the excessive discussion about the operation appears to be Pakistan’s [imprisonment](#) of a doctor, Shakil Afridi, whose contribution to the intelligence operation locating bin Laden was leaked.

- There can be no clearer dissuasion to foreign people willing to assist in the war against terrorists than our inability to protect their identities and shield them from adverse consequences stemming from their cooperation.

## **Cyberattacks on Iran Nuclear Facilities**

“Aides” to President Obama are quoted in a [New York Times](#) article discussing in extensive detail the methods used to attack the computer systems at Iran’s nuclear enrichment facilities.

## **Enemy “Kill List”**

“Three dozen” Obama advisers participated in interviews with the [New York Times](#) in an article describing intelligence methods and the President’s direct participation in the development of a “secret kill list” of terrorists targeted for death or capture.

- The article describes how the President “applies his lawyering skills” to enable “his ferocious campaign against al Qaeda.” Notably, the President has not transferred a single targeted al Qaeda terrorist to Guantanamo. He has instead granted them full constitutional rights enjoyed by American citizens in the civilian criminal justice system.
- The article notes “David Axelrod, the president’s closest political adviser, began showing up at the ‘Terror Tuesday’ meetings [the regular Tuesday counterterrorism meeting of two dozen security officials in the White House Situation Room], his unspeaking presence a visible reminder of what everyone understood: a successful attack would overwhelm the president’s other aspirations and achievements.”

## Underwear Bomber

Soon after an al Qaeda plot to blow up airplanes using an explosive device concealed in a terrorist's underwear became public, Obama Administration officials held a conference call with surrogates and media analysts to discuss intelligence sources and methods of how the plot was foiled.

- As Senators Coats, Burr, and Rubio jointly [wrote](#): “Broadcasting highly classified information notifies every enemy of our tactics and every current and future partner of our inability to provide them the secrecy that often is the difference between life and death.”

## An Investigation Begins

In an interview with CNN on June 6, 2012, discussing the leaking of sensitive national security information, the Chair of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Diane Feinstein, said she has “been on the Intelligence Committee for 11 years and ... never seen it worse.”

Two days later, the President [asserted](#) “The notion that my White House would purposely release classified national security information is offensive.” If that statement were meant to serve as a denial that the Obama Administration leaked classified information, it would appear to stand in direct contrast to the enemy kill list article. That article noted that its methodology for compiling the story included interviews with “three dozen” of the President’s “current and former advisers.” It would seem the President’s Friday statement and the New York Times description cannot both be true at the same time.

Following the President’s statement, Attorney General Eric Holder [announced](#) he had appointed two U.S. Attorneys to lead “separate investigations” “into recent instances of possible unauthorized disclosures of classified information.”